

Hidden Gems

A Partnership Between the Digitization Lab and Photography Studio Art at UNT

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Problem

The Digital Projects Lab at the University of North Texas (UNT) was **in need of an experienced photographer** to operate and oversee its Phase One capture system. There was also a need by MFA students, to gain photography experience in an atmosphere outside of the College of Visual Arts and Design which would help them diversify their skillset.

Solution

The Digital Projects Lab Manager reached out to faculty in the Photography Department in the College of Visual Arts and Design (CVAD) to solicit an interest in digital imaging which led to the creation of a **Graduate Student Assistant Position** in the Digital Projects Lab filled exclusively by MFA students in the photography program.

What is a Graduate Student Assistant at UNT?

A Graduate Student Assistant is a position funded by the Toulouse Graduate School at UNT. The students are salaried and are eligible for the Tuition Benefit Program which covers a part of their tuition costs. They are also eligible for health care plans.

Why a MFA Student Photographer?

The bulk of the digitization work at UNT is done by student employees. The most of these employees are undergraduates whose majors range from sociology to printmaking. The Lab employs anywhere from 10 to 20 imaging students at one time. Given the number of students lab staff oversee, and these students' lack of photography experience, lab staff have found it difficult to have undergraduate student assistants be the Phase One's primary operators. **The complexity of the system demands a higher level of photographic knowledge and experience to be used effectively.**

Advantages of Employing MFA Photography Students

GSAs who come from a photography background are:

- ❖ **easier and quicker to train** (they are already experienced in digital imaging skills such as color management, camera settings, Adobe software, and lighting)
- ❖ **have critical eyes** (they have been trained to see images wholly and critically)
- ❖ **produce fewer imaging errors** on the system (applying the above skillsets to digitization projects results in fewer visual errors (i.e. softness, glaring, hotspots, etc.))
- ❖ **require less supervision** and oversight from staff

Comparison between Images



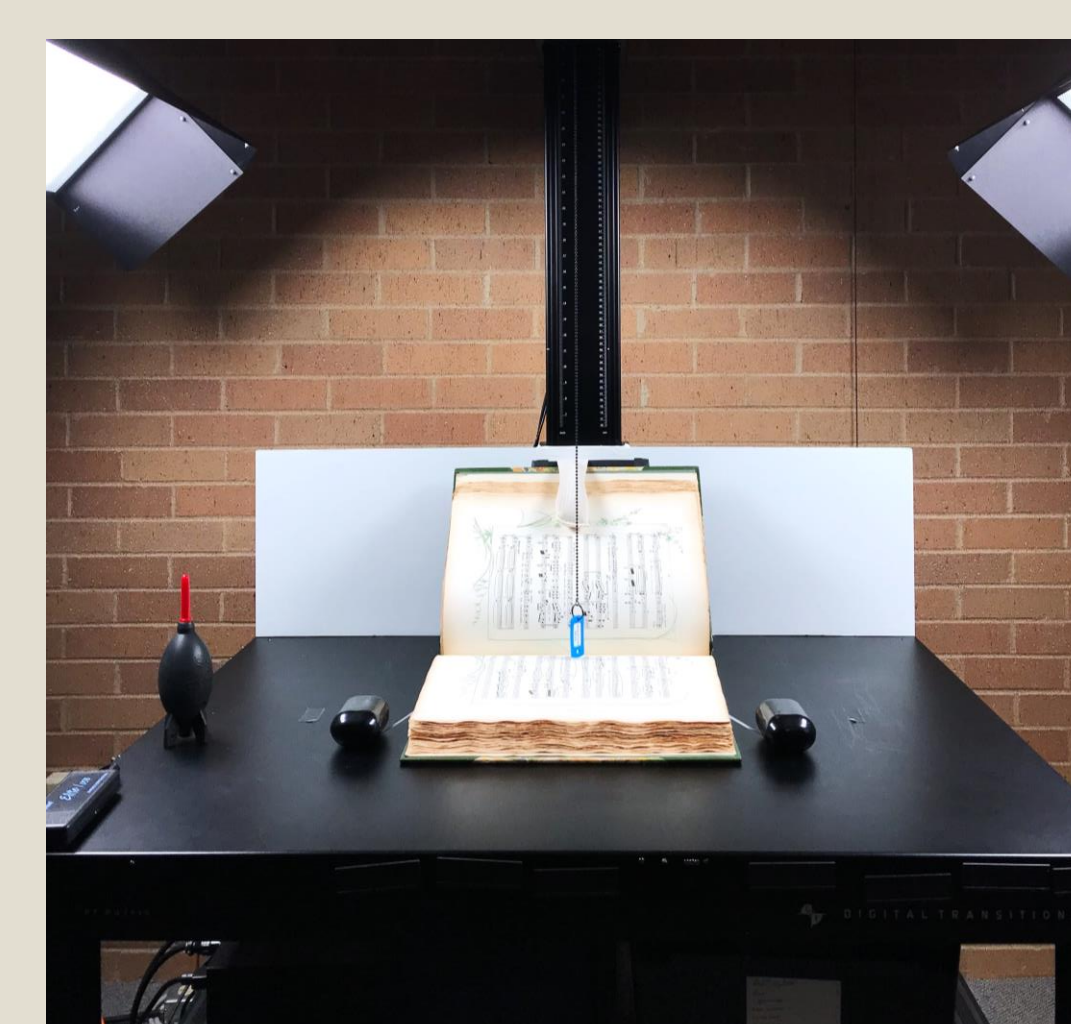
These images were captured incorrectly. Note that the images are overall dark because of the shadow caused by blocking of the light by the opposite side of the book.

These images were captured by the Graduate Student Assistant who is currently being trained in photography. The lighting is more even without shadows.

Variation in Camera Setups



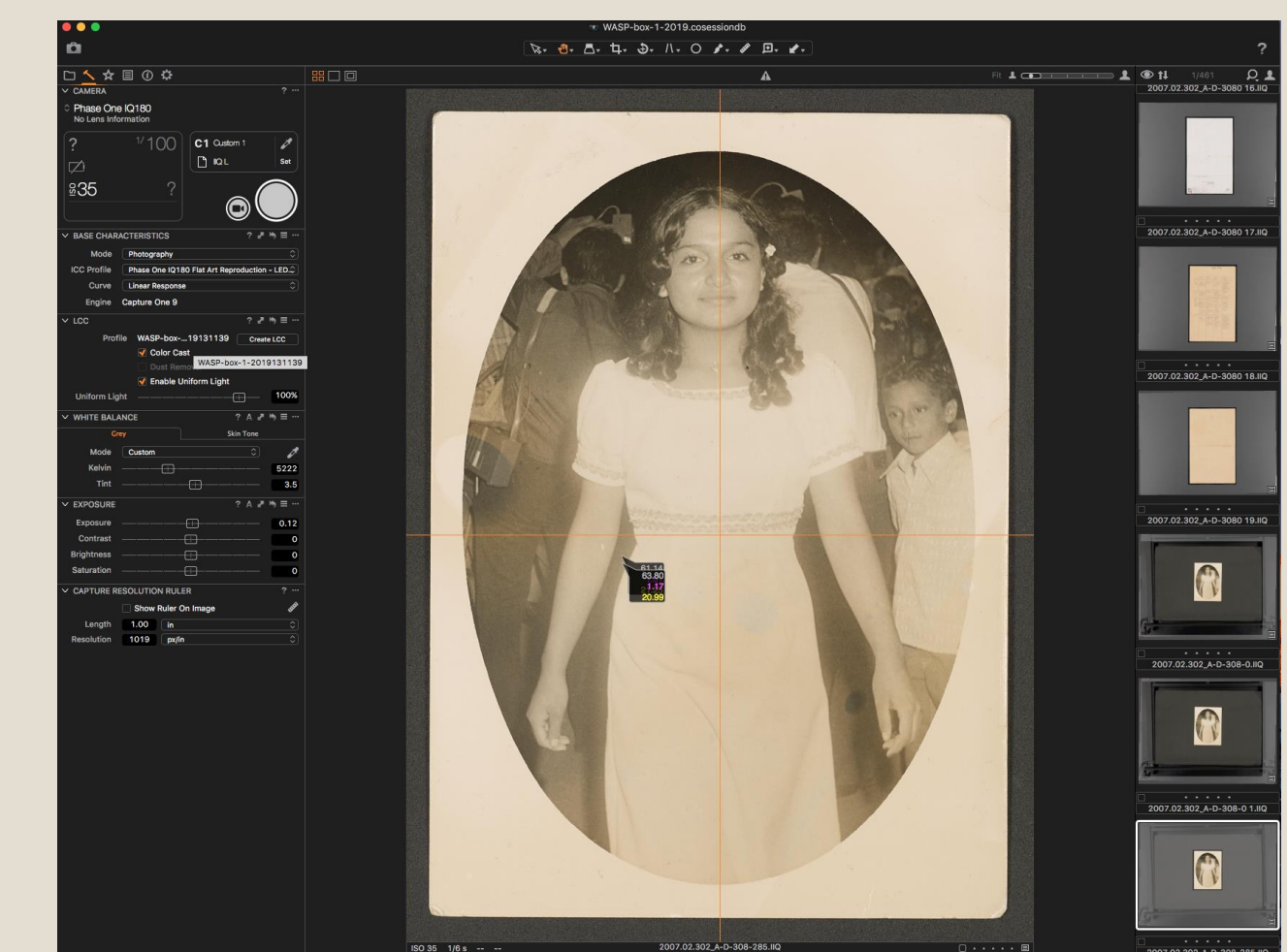
Set up for capturing photographs with glass. This method is ideal for capturing photographs that have a curl or bend to them. The GSA and Lab Manager worked together to put together the rig and ensure the surface the photograph sits on is flush with the glass.



Set up for digitizing special collection books that cannot be digitized properly on other systems. The camera is repositioned throughout the workflow to maintain resolution. The focus and aperture is adjusted to ensure an appropriate depth of field for the object.

Capture System

The system used in the Digital Projects Lab is a tethered capture system using the **Phase One IQ180 Digital Back Camera, DT Element copy stand, DT Photon XL lights, and Capture One Software**. This manner of capturing images is a leading standard in cultural heritage photography. It allows for the digitization of a wide variety of materials at faster rates and with a higher quality than many simpler flatbed scanners that other student assistants use.



Capture One Software Interface

Materials/Collections Completed by 2018-19 GSA

- ❖ Private Collection of the CC Cox Family (mixed late 18th and early 19th century documents)
- ❖ Sayles and Sayles Collection (mixed late 18th and early 19th century documents)
- ❖ Sandborn Rare Music Books
- ❖ George Stone Scrapbook
- ❖ Jack North History Collection (mixed 19th century documents)
- ❖ Dallas Way Buttons
- ❖ WASP collection (photographs and documents)

Conclusion

Skillsets outside of library/information sciences can be valuable to libraries. Inter-departmental partnerships, such as the one between UNT Libraries and the Photography Department, can help pave the road for further establishing the library and its services and meeting its goals and objectives.